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Specialty License Plates to Aid Local Farming

*Massachusetts "Ag Tags" will Support Local Agricultural Organizations and New Programs and Services for Farmers*

BROOKLINE – Joined by state agriculture and transportation officials and representatives of the Bay State farming community, Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs Ian Bowles today announced a campaign to launch the Commonwealth's newest specialty license plate – the Massachusetts Ag Tag to benefit small farms across the Commonwealth.

The Department of Agricultural Resources (DAR) and partner organizations, in cooperation with the Registry of Motor Vehicles, will be taking reservations for Ag Tags beginning today. Once DAR has taken 1,500 reservations, the Registry will produce the Ag Tag plates and motorists will be able to obtain them. Reservations for Ag Tags can be placed through the Department's web site ([www.mass.gov/agr/agtag](http://www.mass.gov/agr/agtag)), as well as at events such as agricultural fairs.

When the program is fully operational, Ag Tag sales are expected to generate approximately \$60,000 annually for the new Massachusetts Agriculture Trust Fund. The Fund will provide a revenue stream for DAR grant programs that help maintain the viability of small and family farms by enabling farmers stay on the cutting edge of agricultural practices and marketing strategies. Ag Tag buyers may also direct a portion of plate proceeds to dozens of regional agricultural organizations or to municipal agricultural commissions, farmers' markets, agricultural fairs, food banks, or county farm bureaus.

"I am pleased to officially kick off the marketing campaign for our new Ag Tags design. Once we have 1,500 orders and these specialty plates are produced, they will give motorists an opportunity to express their support for agriculture both visually and financially," said Secretary Bowles, who made the announcement against the backdrop of Brookline's weekly farmers' market. "People who purchase these plates will be giving a boost to local family farms, and helping to protect thousands of agricultural jobs and to preserve hundreds of thousands of acres of open space and working landscapes."

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Designed by Susan Bergeron West, a Brimfield graphic designer, the colorful Ag Tag features a black and white cow's face surrounded by apples, geraniums, corn and cranberries. The Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles will produce and implement the plates once there are 1,500 Ag Tag reservations in hand, and will support the program permanently if an additional 1,500 Ag Tags are sold within two years of the kick off.

Similar to other specialty license plate programs, Ag Tags will cost motorists \$40 on top of regular registration fees - \$12 of which will go to the Registry for production costs. The Agricultural Trust Fund will receive \$28 for each plate sold, and agricultural organizations responsible for the sale will receive \$15 from the Trust. Proceeds will not be used to subsidize individual farmers or the DAR.

"Massachusetts specialty license plates have provided benefit to a variety of interests in our Commonwealth," said DAR Acting Commissioner Scott Soares. "The purchase of a Massachusetts Ag Tag will similarly allow important opportunities to promote the economic and environmental sustainability of Massachusetts agriculture."

"While Massachusetts has a rich agricultural tradition, going all the way back to our Pilgrim founders and the first Thanksgiving, we are currently losing farmland at an alarming rate," said Rep. Frank Smizik. "This new initiative will display our continued support of locally-grown products, while providing our farmers with additional resources to help them compete in a changing marketplace."

"Towns like Brookline, Newton and Wellesley, in the district I represent, were once farming communities that helped feed the region," added Sen. Cynthia Creem. "Today, when family farms continue to disappear from the landscape, I'm pleased that funds from this license plate will help support farm families, while preserving farmland and promoting local business."

DAR is exploring a variety of avenues for marketing the Ag Tags, including direct sales at fairs and other events, and the possibility of leveraging increased revenue through lotteries, raffles and auctions.

For more information about Massachusetts Ag Tags and the Massachusetts Agricultural Trust Fund, visit [www.mass.gov/agr/agtag](http://www.mass.gov/agr/agtag).

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